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THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER.

THE NEED OF CAREFUL WORKMANSHIP.

SOME months since a lady called upon one of the well-known dealers in novelties, a man who makes fine city trade a specialty, and asked if there was any market for first class work in his line. He assured her that the demand was practically unlimited, and that he could not fill orders then on his books, owing to the scarcity of really superior help to make up high grade novelties.

The lady declared her ability to do the very best grade of work, and to secure the necessary assistance to supply articles in quantity.

The dealer was extremely conservative, and the more enthusiastic the lady grew the more doubtful he became. At last they agreed that samples of various sorts were to be submitted by the lady and her assistants, and upon them the dealer would pass judgment.

It happened in at the store when the samples were sent in. I knew the merchant very well, and at his request remained to see the package opened. The expression on his face when the articles were laid out was a study. Before he had time to speak the lady came in.

Her air of self-satisfied complacency was in striking contrast to the look which I had observed on the merchant's face.

"Well," she said in a tone that had in it an undercurrent of triumphant satisfaction, "How do you like them. Don't you think *they* will take?"

The man hesitated. It was just a trifle trying to be obliged to dash the caller's hopes and to sweep her ideas of success out of existence with one blow, but really there was no help for it. So he fidgeted a little, then replied, "they are very pretty, indeed, Madame, but I am sorry to say they are not at all adapted to our trade, and although I should be very glad to make use of them I cannot do so."

"What! none of them?" asked the lady in dismay.

"N—no. I don't think so. I—"

"Oh just as you like," exclaimed the latter, her face white with anger. "Will you kindly have them wrapped up and I will send for them," and with a sweeping and majestic bow she sailed out of the office.

The man flung himself into his chair with an impatient growl.

"Just like a woman, I suppose," I said with an amused laugh.

"Yes and no," he said. "It is just like that class of women, and of all hopeless tasks it is the most hopeless to try to do anything with them. Now that lady will go home in a towering rage, perhaps in tears. She will impress upon all of her friends the idea that I am a sort of monster, and persuaded her to get a lot of expensive material and to make a quantity of fine things and then—didn't want them of *course*, and she might have known that I did not. Why, there is not in that entire lot, let me see, six, eight, twelve, fifteen samples, one single thing that is properly made. There are a couple of excellent ideas, and some very happy combinations of color, but the work is atrocious. Just see here," and he took up a handkerchief case made of the most exquisite materials and with colors admirably arranged. "Just look at this. The outside is exactly seven eighths of an inch longer on one side than it is on the other, and the lining is more than an inch off from a straight edge. One of the bows is half an inch further from the edge than the other, and the cord on the edge, as you see, is almost out of twist on one side and perfect the rest of the way. The lining is neither straightway of the cloth or bias. Indeed in the sewing and fitting there is not one item that is really correct. Why didn't I tell her so? Why should I. She would only give me one of those freezing reproachful glances and ask me if I thought every body was going to carry a ruler and tape measure when they went out to shop. She hasn't a mechanical eye, that is the trouble, and she cannot see that such work as that is just time and raw material wasted. Now I could furnish almost unlimited work for women making fancy articles, but they will almost invariably do just this sort of thing. But for the forlorn hope that I may by good luck run across a woman who can do something, I would never look at a lot of samples again. I tell you I am disgusted," and the gentleman summoned a boy to put the articles in order to be returned to their owner.

This is only one of several instances where I have seen just such results from similar efforts. Merchants and manufacturers do not like to tell ladies that their work is at fault, so they make the state of the market or public taste, or some other condition, the excuse for not accepting their samples and work. One manufacturer has bought several lots of samples just to avoid a scene, but then the same women have returned with a quantity of samples, some of them the merest trash, and these he has been forced to decline.

In view of this state of things it must be admitted that there is a very great lack of mathematical accuracy among women. The first advice necessary is, take special care that every stitch,

line, fold and adjustment is perfectly correct. If you occupy an hour or a day getting the first sample or piece of work absolutely true, it is time well spent. Do a little, but let that little be without fault, and gradually increase in speed, but never at the expense of the quality of the work.

It will be one of the aims of this department of THE DECORATOR AND FURNISHER to raise the standard of quality in womens' work, and to give them substantial help in that direction.

There are but few women who do not think that they can sew and do fancy work, but those who can do good work are in such a hopeless minority that the world has come to tolerate a lower grade of excellence, simply because it cannot do better.

Needlework or fancy work should be taught like drawing, line by line, thread by thread, and with every stitch slanting in the same direction. An interesting and amusing experiment was recently tried in a suburban village. The ladies were assembled in the weekly sewing circle. Nearly all of them considered themselves good needlewomen, and some of them were quite proud of their skill in this direction. A gentleman who was well known as a practical joker came in and unfolding a small package took out a couple of yards of fine felt and a number of small skeins of embroidery silk. Curiosity was aroused as to the object of this, when he announced that he had made a wager which depended for its successful carrying out on their good will and co-operation.

A man well known in the town as a croaker and growler of the worst description, had declared that women were degenerating, that the sewing machine had destroyed needlework, and that steam power had made muscle power unpopular by contrast, and that women could not sew very well anyway. The speaker said that he had resented the charge, and the other had offered to wager that out of the sewing society then in session not one in ten could be found who could hem, make a good buttonhole, or embroider a single scallop edge. The wager was \$25, and the speaker had agreed if he won to turn the money, with an additional \$25, into the treasury of the society. There were sixty ladies of all ages present; the cloth was divided into sixty parts, each was numbered and entered upon a book brought by the gentleman for the purpose. Each lady who took a sample was numbered and her name was put down.

An hour was given for the trial. At the end of that time the pieces were handed in.

There were ten perfect button holes, and fourteen that were tolerable, thirty-two had done very creditable hemming, and nine had wrought a scalloped edge that a dealer might accept as a fair sample of good work. The society was richer by twenty dollars cash, and disbanded in a somewhat quiet and thoughtful temper.

Classes in plain sewing were organized the next week, and several ladies of mature years showed their good sense by becoming pupils. If anyone doubts the probability of this statement let them try the experiment at the next meeting of their sewing circle.

This is the reason why so many women are complaining that their fancy articles are not accepted at the Art Exchanges, and is one reason why so many women are out of work.

